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Hill, David

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CHINA

1889.

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Wesleyan Foreign Missionary  
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THE  
CENTRAL CHINA LAY MISSION,  
BY  
THE SUPERINTENDENT.

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BATLEY :

PRINTED BY J. S. NEWSOME, CAXTON BUILDINGS, COMMERCIAL ST.



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Lay Missions both at home and abroad are rapidly coming to the front. At home, the Joyful News Mission has demonstrated, by its vigorous growth, both the actual need and the abundant supply for such an Agency to be found within the pale of Methodism.

Abroad the need is vaster, and the supply should be proportionately greater. Of our Mission fields none perhaps have been more blessed of God in their Lay Missionaries than China. The first Wesleyan Missionary was a Yorkshire Local Preacher, an unpaid Lay Evangelist, who worked his way to China, and thro' God, laid the foundations of the Canton Mission. In Central China too, one of our best Missionary Evangelists was moved to come out at his own charges, and for 10 years has laboured hard as a Lay Evangelist, distributing more Tracts in Central China than perhaps any other Missionary ordained or unordained. But no man has been so manifestly used of God for the development of Lay Evangelism in China generally as the Rev. I. Hudson Taylor. The China Inland Mission of which he is the Director, has, besides sending 300 Missionaries into the field, to a greater or less extent quickened every other Mission in the Country. Its undenominational character has gathered around it Missionaries from every important section of the Church of Christ in Great Britain, and as might be expected, Methodism is not without its representatives. Some of these have already joined the Baptists, others, though not connected with our own Society, still retain their early love, and have only joined the Inland Mission for lack of a Lay Mission in Methodism. To meet this want in Central China, two Agencies have been called out during the past four years, so that British Methodists desirous of continuing their connexion with their Mother Church, whilst labouring as Laymen in the farther East, have now before them two doors of entrance to that field. One is that of the Central China Lay Mission, the other that of the Foreign Department of the Joyful News Mission. The latter, though later in the field, is perhaps the more widely known throughout the Home Churches. As regards government and organization it approaches nearer to the China Inland Mission than the former, but as its principles have been so extensively published in the "Joyful News," the present paper will bear more upon the Central China Lay Mission.

This Mission was first commenced some four years ago. The need for such an Agency had pressed upon the Missionaries of the Wu-Chang District for years, and had once and again been represented to the Parent Society; but a straitened exchequer prevented the Society in creasing its responsibilities, and hence arose, thro' the call of God, the Lay Mission to Central China. The need then felt still continues, and year by year becomes more pressingly urgent; its full representation is the due of the Methodist Church.

The vastness of the field of a Missionary in Central China is rarely, and then but vaguely, realized by Christian people in England. The language he speaks is more widely understood and commands a larger population than perhaps that of any other Mission field on the face of the Earth. Unintelligible in Canton and along the South East Coast, his Mandarin dialect, fluently spoken, will yet carry him beyond Peking on the North and from Nanking on the East to the very frontiers of China Proper on the West, and thus afford an access to some 200 millions of the people.

To meet the spiritual need of this immense population the Wesleyan Methodist Churches of Great Britain have for years past only had one small Mission of eight men in Central China. True the position they occupy is one of the most commanding Missionary Centres in the world, but the very occupancy of such a post involves an obligation to go forward which we may not disown.

To two of his brave band of Evangelists Mr. Wesley wrote: 'It is not expedient to break up more ground than you can keep, to preach at any more places than you and your brethren can constantly attend. To preach once in a place and no more very seldom does any good: it only alarms the Devil and his children, and makes them more upon their guard against a first assault.'

And yet this is what we are practically doing in Central China. The daily congregations in the Hankow and Wu-Chang Chapels, numbering from 1000 to 1500 a day for five days in the week are composed of persons from all parts of the Province and many from still more distant places. They hear the Gospel preached, they buy a Christian tract, they return to their home, but not being sufficiently acquainted with the momentousness of the message, nor sufficiently awakened to seek further light, they continue only the more steadfastly in their worship of Heaven and Earth, the highest form of devotion they have any clear conception of, or, it may be, seek further instruction from the ubiquitous Roman Catholic Missionary. And yet this public proclamation of the Gospel in the city Chapels of this great Missionary Centre may not be discontinued. Already it has been the means by which

hundreds of souls have been won to Christ; but this very success in Hankow and the neighbourhood has prevented the resident Missionaries carrying the war further on into the enemy's camp. The claims of yearly increasing Churches for pastoral care, the preparation of Christian literature, the Medical, Educational and other charitable concomitants of Missionary Work in a great centre so occupy the brethren residing there that they cannot traverse the great waterways of the Han and the Yangtze in pursuit of partially awakened men, and as a consequence 60 out of the 68 Counties in this one Province of Hoopeh, which is itself half as large again as both England and Wales, have been left without a single Protestant Missionary of any Society to follow up the work of the Central Stations,—to say nothing of the 170 millions of Mandarin-speaking people in other Provinces. It was more especially to meet this want that the Lay Mission was Established. The present staff, including Mr. Mitchil, who, this year, has however lent his services to the Hankow and Kwang Chi Circuits, numbers 10 Missionaries, 7 Foreign and 3 Native: of these, 7 are in full work, 3 preparing for it. The 7 include Dr. Morley, who is in charge of the Teh Ngan Hospital, and Mr. Mitchil, who for the present year is taking Circuit Work. Thus there are but 5 Evangelists in actual service at the present time; yet the Report of the past year is the most promising hitherto presented. 12 inquirers have been given as the first-fruits of this Service. None of these is yet baptized, but having given evidence of the working of the Spirit of God on their minds, and having a desire to flee from the wrath to come, their names have been registered as on trial for Church Membership, and they are now being visited from time to time for the purpose of instruction and confirmation in the faith. The need of such visitation has, even the last few days, been made painfully apparent. In and around the Village of To Pao Wan, 200 miles up the River Han, a few names were received during last year, books were distributed, instruction given, and one of these sent his idol to a neighbouring temple: they were commended to God, and the Missionary left. Soon after his departure, an epidemic broke out in that neighbourhood, and the wife of Mr. Wu, who had abandoned his idolatry, in her anxiety and terror pressed and prevailed upon her husband to recall the abandoned image. Another of these inquirers is a Doctor, who in visiting his Patients is, according to Chinese etiquette, pressed to take tea and tobacco, and, alas! a whiff of the opium pipe too, for that has now in many places become the mark of a generous hospitality, even in rural districts. To these pressing invitations he has yielded, and tho' still free from the craving, has approached dangerously near the precipice. The rest of the inquirers we found engaged in a trade so linked with idolatry that only one of them came to Christian worship. After earnest remonstrance Mr. Wu returned his idol to the temple, Dr. Wang handed

his to the Missionary, and will, we hope, abandon opium for ever. But these temporary lapses attest the need of frequent oversight, a need which received additional emphasis from a letter which came to hand a few days before we started on our journey: it is from the oldest of our three Chinese Colporteurs, and refers to a Mr. Chia, another inquirer, 300 miles to the East of the village referred to above, near to the market town of Hwang Sz Kang on the South bank of the Yangtze. This man has shown himself a more intelligent and earnest seeker after God than those on the Han river, but the letter informs us that as he is ripening for baptism the Roman Catholics in that neighbourhood, hearing of his desire to become a Christian, have been visiting him and are now seeking to win him to their Communion; and our native brother through whose instrumentality he was first awakened naturally urges a speedy admission into the Church.

These cases all show how needful it is to have a considerable and increasing staff of men to watch over and care for newly awakened souls: and as these multiply the area of broadcast sowing and of aggressive evangelism will of necessity be narrowed, unless large reinforcements are thrust out into the field. And yet wherever we go in these aggressive movements, we meet with numbers of men who from one quarter or another have heard something of the Gospel message. One will bring a Testament he has purchased from a Bible Colporteur, which he has been unable to understand; another will give the name of a Missionary he has heard preach in Hankow; a third will tell you that he has been a patient in one of the Mission Hospitals; a fourth will produce a Christian book presented to him at some examination; others, though never having heard the Missionary, will follow you for a book, as an old man did the other day, and say that they too are engaged in a like charitable work, or, as another man did to-day, will purchase a few sheet tracts for gratuitous distribution, or after you have finished your address will urge you to go on and tell them more. These cases, tho' not infrequent, are still the exception, the great mass of our hearers being indifferent to the message, asleep in worldliness and sin; yet in almost every street-congregation one or two will be found who show a thoughtful attention to the word spoken, and seem not far from the Kingdom of God. The question then is, shall this generation pass away with but a glimmer of the dawn, when, if the Church of Christ were but true to her Lord it might enjoy the full blaze of Gospel light? Shall the seed sown by Protestant Missionaries be gathered into Roman Catholic garners? Shall a selfish love of ease debilitate the Home Churches and ruin a possible harvest of souls in foreign lands?

That such may not be, these Lay Missions have been established, and that the Home Churches may be incited to more vigorous effort and



to a more entire consecration on behalf of the heathen world, the work of a Chinese Lay Missionary is here portrayed. But before touching on their work, a word or two as to the workers. The brethren of the Lay Mission are men truly converted to God: moved by the love of Christ they are willing to spend and be spent for the Chinese, and are inwardly conscious of a divine call to this work. They are well borne witness to in the circuits from which they have come, and have already had fruit to their ministry there. They know their Bibles well, and have at least had a good *English* education; they are men of robust health and of good constitution; they are willing by the help of God to remain unmarried for six years; and are prepared to rough it as Chinese Evangelists must do, and yet be happy in roughing it. Native houses, hard fare, and plenty of work, these are the conditions. A fixed, but moderate, allowance is guaranteed. This fixing a given sum for the brethren has been objected to by some who would rather follow the method of the China Inland Mission, and divide all receipts amongst the Missionaries without guaranteeing any fixed sum. This *may* be a more excellent way, and if so we would cheerfully follow it; but that still remains to be proved, and in the run of years the brethren of that Mission seem to have a pretty clear idea of the amount they are likely to receive. To men of the right mettle this is a matter of slight moment, and a voluntary surrender of a part of their due allowance may even prove a more healthful exercise than leaving the sum unfixed, and dividing whatever comes; and it is well understood that any brother desirous of receiving a smaller sum is quite at liberty to do so. A few examples of this sort on the part of laymen possessed of some private means would be of immense benefit to the Mission. Then as to the non-guaranteeing of a fixed amount, or the "faith principle" as it has come to be termed, there is no doubt that if the funds of the Lay Mission should fail, and appeal have to be made to the brethren in active work, that they would gladly meet the emergency rather than abandon their work. What that work is we may now go on to say. Its general characteristics may be gathered from past reports of the Lay Mission, which the Treasurer, Mr. J. R. Hill, of York, will be glad to supply: but fuller details may here be added.

The first two years of the Missionary's life are mainly occupied in the study of the language, and examinations are conducted at the close of each year. The brethren do not however confine themselves to study, but, as ability to speak is acquired, they exercise their gifts either in the nearest Chapel or in Evangelistic journeys taken along with Chinese colleagues. On the expiry of the first two years, they give themselves wholly to the work of Evangelism, and from Hankow as the centre, go forth, two and two, one native and one foreigner, brethren in one common

Lord, to the innumerable towns and villages around within a radius of 100 or more miles. A suitable selection of Christian tracts is made, and these, along with their bedding and change of linen and a few books, constitute their baggage on such journeys.

They travel chiefly by native boat, and work along the great waterways of the rivers Yangtze and Han and their many tributary streams, branching off here and there to market towns away from these water courses, when they hire wheelbarrows for their baggage and themselves go afoot. On these road journeys they stay at native inns, which are neither very comfortable nor very costly. If a man can but adapt himself to a chop-stick diet he can get on fairly well for 8d. or 10d. a day, which sum includes shelter, lighting and table d'hôte, though the shelter is not so good as that of many a stable, nor the lighting equal to that of a farthing candle.

Several hours in the day are spent in the streets of the towns. With a handful of tracts and Testaments the Missionary sallies forth, and, finding some open space where the street traffic is not interfered with, he takes his stand, and if in foreign dress is at once surrounded by passers by, together with the shopmen of the neighbourhood. If in native dress, his congregation, though generally a quieter one, gathers more slowly. As the people are collecting he offers his tracts for sale, explains their purport, and chats with immediate bystanders. The crowd is soon gathered; then he begins a brief address, and unfolding some of the cardinal truths of religion, he reasons of righteousness, temperance and judgment to come, closing with an earnest appeal to the conscience of his hearers, and urging them to turn from the vanities of idolatry and sin to the living and true God.

His congregation now numbers 40 to 60 persons of all ages and all grades of the non-official classes: immediately around him stand a few little street arabs, with baskets on their arms for gathering sticks for fuel; close by a batch of school-boys, often apt to be somewhat noisy; then the apprentices from the neighbouring shops, and then, in the outer circle of the crowd, a very promiscuous gathering of the people of the neighbourhood: the honest, open-faced, sunburnt farmer; the sharp-featured, sunken-eyed, sallow-cheeked, opium smoking, Yamun runner; the sleek, stout, thriving merchant; the lean, hungry, shabbily-dressed schoolmaster; the drowsy, listless, placid priest of Buddha; the self-assured, self-satisfied, self-conceited Confucianist—a strange and motley gathering stand before the preacher and hear, some for the first time, some for the tenth, the Words of this Life; and when the power of God comes down upon preacher and people, the stillness of the crowd, the close attention, the earnest gaze assure them both that the kingdom of God has come



nigh unto them. A few books are disposed of, a few questions asked and answered, and the native colporteur takes up the theme, and with perhaps a slowly melting audience once more presses home the truth. Then, after a few more questions and a few more sales, the two Evangelists move on to another standpoint, and thus from point to point they encompass the city, returning to their inn or boat well-nigh worn out both in body and mind to commit to the Lord the work commenced in His Name.

On rainy days, and sometimes on fair ones too, every shop in a street is visited, one taking one side, one another, opportunity being thus afforded for closer and more friendly intercourse—or for more rude and cutting rebuff. Invitations to the inn or boat for more private conversation are but rarely availed of, though now and then an inquirer turns up; and if we but live and labour in the Spirit of Christ these will doubtless multiply as our visits are more frequent and our stay more protracted.

This rough hard work is at present a breaking up of fallow ground, to be followed in successive months and years by the continued scattering of the seed until the reaper overtakes the sower, and both rejoice together. For the foreign Missionary it is a high-class school for the study of patience, calmness, self-control, for the display of a ready wit, for the test of a credited enthusiasm, for the exercise of a desperate faith, a patient hope and a fervent charity; for his native colleague perhaps the best Training College in the Mission field. To some at home it may seem as though a man were burying himself alive, for him to give himself to such a life as this, hidden away from his own countrymen, and week after week seeing none of the Missionaries of the District; but to those engaged in it, trying, as it is at times, it gives a sense of freedom, a scope of influence, a possibility of service immeasurably broader than those of our old avocations in England. For six months in the year the weather is on our side, and this outdoor work is health-giving and enjoyable; for four it means a severe battle with the elements. The fierce rays of a tropical sun in the summer and the bitter biting winds of winter demand both robustness of constitution and firmness of determination in the prosecution of this service.

Thus far the Lord has raised up for us a Chinese Colleague for every European Evangelist ready for work, and native brethren thus trained are acquiring a fitness for pastoral work as years go on, and as the Churches now being gathered in increase and multiply.

It is our hope and purpose to avoid the heavy expenditure incurred in Mission buildings in past years; rather would we by the help of God train newly-awakened and converted souls to steady self-reliance, and

foster thus a healthy and self-supporting Church. In aggressive movements we lay down no hard and fast lines, rather follow as we are led;—where the Spirit of God is working, there would we go. Generally speaking however our principle of action would be “from near to far,” and “first near, then far,” only covering so much ground as we may hope to revisit with some measure of frequency. Such in brief is the Evangelistic work which God has given to Methodist young men in China; and scores, nay hundreds, of men are needed for it. Who then is willing to consecrate his services *thus* unto the Lord?

But besides this Evangelistic agency, other branches of Christian work are proposed by the Lay Mission. A Medical Department has already been commenced and a Hospital opened in the Teh Ngan Prefecture, and it is not too much to hope that every one of the ten Prefectures in Hoopoh will, in a few years' time, have each its Medical Missionary. The Station already occupied really belongs to the Parent Society, and as Dr. Morley is remarkably fitted for aggressive work, and as remarkably ready to do it, it is hoped the Parent Society will soon be able to meet the responsibilities of the Stations under her charge, and set free the Lay Medical Missionary for a further advance. Few spheres of usefulness are more to be desired by earnest Christian Medical Students than that of Medical Missionary in Central China.

But if the body of Christ is rightly to represent her head, there is other work to be done in this vast and needy field. There is poverty to be relieved, age to be cared for, the blind, and the orphan, and the outcast, and the lost to be gathered under the wings of Jesus, if a perfect Christ is to win the admiration of these Easterns and to outshine Confucian glory. A very feeble commencement has been made on behalf of the blind, but there is hope of help ere long in this endeavour. The rest plead patiently and mutely for a loving, living ministry which seems so long in coming.

In conclusion, if the thought of these 200 millions of souls, all speaking the same language, and all accessible to the Missionaries of Central China rested on our hearts as they do on the heart of our Saviour, we should as a Church, that is we should each one as an individual member of that Church, surely do more for their salvation than we are doing at present.

It is true there are other Societies at work in this great field, but the question with us is, “Are *we* as a Church doing all *we* can for their salvation when we only send some eight or ten ordained and the same number of Lay Missionaries, with a few ladies, to Evangelize and save them?”

Let the praying men and women of Methodism lay this matter to heart, and each of us ask his own heart. Have I wrestled in prayer as earnestly and effectually as I might that the Missionaries in the field, both native and foreign, may be willing to count all things loss for Christ, and become all things to all men, that by all means they may save some? Have I pleaded with God to send more labourers to Central China as faithfully and perseveringly as I ought? \*

Let the educated sons and daughters of well-to-do Laymen, whose every blessing temporal and spiritual has been received within the pale of Methodism, ponder this matter in the light of eternity, and each one honestly ask the question, May not God have some work for me to do in that country? Is there any sufficient reason why I should not offer myself for this work? Would not my life be more effectively spent, if thus devoted to the extension of Christ's Kingdom in China than it is likely to be in England? Is He not even now calling me to this ministry? God grant to each one an eye so single that in replying to these questions our whole body shall be full of light!

\* There is a Prayer Union for Central China, of which the Secretary will be glad to send particulars to any one desiring them. Address Rev. J. W. Brewer, Liskeard, Cornwall.



